

Retail Service Area

Definition, Delineation, and Meaning July 18, 2005

The Municipal Water Law (MWL) requires Municipal Water Suppliers (MWS) to delineate their retail service area in water system plans (WSP) and applicable WSP amendments, approved after September 9, 2003.

Definition

The retail service area identifies where a MWS currently provides direct water service and plans to provide new water service. The requirement to delineate a retail service area applies to MWS with WSPs and applicable WSP amendments approved after September 9, 2003.

A MWS must include within its retail service area all areas where retail service is currently being provided. A MWS may also include within its retail service area areas outside where service is currently being provided.

Delineation

Prior to delineating its retail service area, a MWS should consider its readiness and ability to provide water service. In doing so, the following elements should be considered:

- The *duty to serve* requirement established in the MWL.
- The size, location, and physical features of its own existing and future water service areas, and those of adjacent utilities.
- Population projections and land use designation.
- Its own provision-of-service policies.
- Identification of resources to construct facilities needed to meet growth demands.
- Commitments, pending requests, and potential requests for water service.
- System capacity and approved number of connections as determined by DOH.
- Water right limitations.
- A public process for setting and changing the retail service area.
- Applicable requirements under the Coordination Act (RCW 70.116).

Provision of water service outside a MWS's retail service area requires approval of a WSP amendment prior to extending service.

A MWS may not modify the boundary of its retail service area after receipt of a request for service if:

- The applicant for new service is located within the retail service area and
- The modification would result in excluding the applicant for new service from the proposed retail service area.

A modification of a MWS's retail service area boundary requires development of a WSP amendment, submitted to DOH for review and approval.

Meaning

The retail service area, designated by a MWS, connects two very important elements in the MWL:

- The retail service area establishes where the requirement for *consistency* with local comprehensive plans and development regulations applies. A MWS must demonstrate consistency within its retail service area as part of the WSP approval process.
- The retail service area establishes where a water system has a duty to serve. If a request for service from within the retail service area is made, and the MWS meets certain conditions, the MWS is obligated to provide service.